



Tourists discover the “Carnival Spirit” during a gala evening in Oranjestad

Contrary to what many people think, Carnival is not just a one-day parade through the streets of Oranjestad, but it began in earnest on January 6 with the first parade, the Fakkal Optocht or “Torch Parade.” In the short five weeks until Ash Wednesday, the island will be a frenzy of activities, including parades, queen elections, and various musical contests. Most island visitors will not have the opportunity to attend these events, so beginning last year, a special evening to introduce them to all the aspects of Carnival was inaugurated.

On Sunday evening, the area fronting the Monument Bureau was bright with spotlights as the sound of music spread through Oranjestad while some of the great youth entertainers of Carnival displayed their talents for the crowd that filled the square.

Jubi Naar, “Mr. Carnival,” hosted the evening, ably assisted by Quincy Hasham, a noted competitor for the title of “Youth Road March King.” Joining them in entertaining the gathering were Youth Extreme, North Star Steel Band, Mini and Youth Sunrise Dance Groups, Timberiche and Lollipop Dance Groups, and the Coco Rico Carnival Dance Troupe. Title winner youth performers included Charella Lopes, Quincy and Lady K. Other youth performers included Kelly Ann Odor, Jonathan Thiel, and Nicole Croes. Each performance was a show-stopper as the audience learned to move their hips to the beat with classic Carnival songs from the past that are still heard on the radio. Jubi and Quincy provided a brief history of the different performers, giving the gathering some insight into Carnival, and the musical families that make it a part of their lives.

The gathering, consisting of both island visitors and residents, met last year’s Youth Queen Hilly Anne Croes, resplendent in her sparkling crown, and the newly elected Mrs. Carnival, Joseline Henriquez. They were also introduced to Tecla Kelly, President of the Stichting Arubaanse Carnival, who is the woman, along with a terrific, devoted staff that works tirelessly to see that all the Carnival events are a success.

One of the highlights of the evening was a performance by the Jacobs Family Group, headed by patriarch Francis. Francis, a long-time performer in Carnival, can be seen entertaining at various resorts, and has spawned three incredibly talented children that follow in their father’s footsteps. His son, John Francis, sang lead for the famed Carnival song “For our Family,” with Dad and sister Francela doing back up. The youngest performer in the family, eight-year-old Celiandra, earned thunderous applause for her rendition of her Carnival song, “Nanny the Monkey.” Father Francis finally lead all the local Carnival personalities in showing the audience how to “dance like a Chinese” with the popular song “Wok,” which, in a rare treat, even Tecla Kelly got up to demonstrate. Some members of the audience, such as little Julie Hayes of Union, New Jersey were so infused with the Carnival spirit she couldn’t help but jump up and join the group, who welcomed her participation.

The Carnival Tourist Night was a lively evening that embodied the music and spirit of Carnival. Visitors had an opportunity to “go native,” by sampling local food inexpensively, and happily joining in during the festivities. It was an opportunity to truly experience the dance and music and culture of the island, which sums up Carnival. It is not just something to be watched, but also shared, as you will see the islanders, even if they are not participating, are also dancing along, and tourists are welcomed to try. If you don’t know the steps, just ask a dancing Aruban, and they will be happy to show you how. The new tradition of tourist night proved to be a great success and a wonderful experience for those that attended!